

EPA Proposes Clean Air Standards for Harmful Soot Pollution

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EPA

99 percent of U.S. counties projected to meet proposed standards without any additional actions

WASHINGTON – In response to a court order, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today proposed updates to its national air quality standards for harmful fine particle pollution, including soot (known as PM2.5). These microscopic particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and have been linked to a wide range of serious health effects, including premature death, heart attacks, and strokes, as well as acute bronchitis and aggravated asthma among children. A federal court ruling required EPA to update the standard based on best available science. Today's proposal, which meets that requirement, builds on smart steps already taken by the EPA to slash dangerous pollution in communities across the country. Thanks to these steps, 99 percent of U.S. counties are projected to meet the proposed standard without any additional action.

EPA's proposal would strengthen the annual health standard for harmful fine particle pollution (PM2.5) to a level within a range of 13 micrograms per cubic meter to 12 micrograms per cubic meter. The current annual standard is 15 micrograms per cubic meter. The proposed changes, which are consistent with the advice from the agency's independent science advisors, are based on an extensive body of scientific evidence that includes thousands of studies – including many large studies which show negative health impacts at lower levels than previously understood. By proposing a range, the agency will collect input from the public as well as a number of stakeholders, including industry and public health groups, to help determine the most appropriate final standard to protect public health. It is important to note that the proposal has zero effect on the existing daily standard for fine particles or the existing daily standard for coarse particles (PM10), both of which would remain unchanged.

Thanks to recent Clean Air Act rules that have and will dramatically cut pollution, 99 percent of U.S. counties are projected to meet the proposed standards without undertaking any further actions to reduce emissions.

Meanwhile, because reductions in fine particle pollution have direct health benefits including decreased mortality rates, fewer incidents of heart attacks, strokes, and childhood asthma, these standards have major economic benefits with comparatively low costs. Depending on the final level of

the standard, estimated benefits will range from \$88 million a year, with estimated costs of implementation as low as \$2.9 million, to \$5.9 billion in annual benefits with a cost of \$69 million – a return ranging from \$30 to \$86 for every dollar invested in pollution control. While EPA cannot consider costs in selecting a standard under the Clean Air Act, those costs are estimated as part of the careful analysis undertaken for all significant regulations, as required by Executive Order 13563 issued by President Obama in January 2011.

The Clean Air Act requires EPA to review its standards for particle pollution every five years to determine whether the standards should be revised. The law requires the agency to ensure the standards are “requisite to protect public health with an adequate margin of safety” and “requisite to protect the public welfare.” A federal court ordered EPA sign the proposed particle pollution standards by June 14, 2012, because the agency did not meet its five-year legal deadline for reviewing the standards.

EPA will accept public comment for 63 days after the proposed standards are published in the Federal Register. The agency will hold two public hearings; one in Sacramento, CA. and one in Philadelphia, PA. Details on the hearings will be announced shortly. EPA will issue the final standards by December 14, 2012.

Map showing counties in attainment in 2020: <http://epa.gov/pm/2012/map.pdf>

More information: <http://www.epa.gov/pm> /Release Date: 06/15/2012

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